

On writing

“I believe that writers run out of material, I really do.” – Brian Wilson

I don't believe that writers run out of material, or at least not exactly. I will rebut this a little with a quote from one of my favorite authors:

“If you only write when you're inspired, you may be a fairly decent poet but you'll never be a novelist because you're going to have to make your word count and those words aren't going to wait for whether you're inspired or not. So, you have to write when you're not inspired and you have to write the scenes that don't inspire you....when people come to me and they say I want to be a writer, what should I do, I say you have to write. Sometimes they say, well I'm already doing that what else should I do, and I say you have to finish things because that's where you learn from. You learn by finishing things.” – Neil Gaiman

There are days that I don't want to write. Since Katja was born, there have been more days that I don't want to write than days I do. There are a myriad of things to write about if I just look around a little, but I am tired. At the moment, it is 6:30 in the morning. I have been up since 4:45, fed Katja and gotten her back to sleep, gone for a 1.5 mile run in 24 degree weather (one of my toes went numb!), and done dishes. All of those are things that I can write about. Katja's contented snuggling when she finished her bottle, the streetlights making the frosty grass sparkle, coming home to a warm house, the satisfaction of creating order from chaos: each of these could be the beginning of something interesting, be it short or long. Each could provide a snippet of a novel, a scene of contentment or thoughtfulness, or a description of fighting for something, even something as small as wanting to be the best person possible for those you love.

I think that writers suffer from a couple of problems when they are focused on trying to write. One is that they get so wrapped up in their writing that they forget to lift up their heads once in a while and look at the world. When I get particularly stymied, sometimes I will go someplace very busy. I will sit on a bench and watch people. I see how they interact with each other and wonder why. I look at how they dress, how they move, how they present themselves to the world. I think about what I might have in common with them and what I might not, what their day might be like, and why they react that way. I see kindness and cruelty, laughter and pain, and the stories start running in my head again. Sometimes it doesn't take much. A brightly woven scarf on an otherwise very mousy person, for instance, or a small act of kindness, unexpected.

The other problem I see is fear. We write for an audience, whether or not that is our primary goal. I write here because I need to sort out the world, but I know there are a few people who read it. I choose my words carefully (or I try to, at least) and I am very aware that I have an audience, even though it is small. That sometimes chokes my words. I sit down to write and I start thinking too much about what it might sound like to someone else. Once I'm thinking about that, it is almost impossible for me to write anything. I think it sounds stupid or inane or that no one will get past the first paragraph without giving up in disgust.

I had an English teacher who had us write a page in five minutes at the beginning of every class. We didn't have to write anything in particular; if all we wrote was one word or one sentence, that was fine. We just had to write. As we got better, as the year progressed, she began giving us topics, but we still got a good grade on the exercise if we filled a page. It seemed somewhat silly at the time, but it taught me that sometimes I just need to start writing, even if I don't feel like there is anything to write about.

I have been singing all my life. I am not amazing, but I'm not bad. I enjoy singing. I don't much like performing, though, for the same reason that writing is sometimes difficult. I do not like feeling judged. I doubt that anyone really does. There is a song that helps me a little, though, that I first heard on Sesame Street when I was fairly young and have loved ever since. It's called Sing (Sing a Song) and it is, as far as I can tell, originally by the Carpenters.

Here are the lyrics that make it easier to keep singing and writing and trying:

Sing, sing a song,
Make it simple, to last your whole life long
Don't matter if it's not good enough for anyone else to hear,
Sing, sing a song.

It doesn't matter if these words are never read or if my music is never heard. I still need to write and I still need to sing. Both of these make my life fuller and more interesting, make me happier, make me pay more attention to the world.

I believe that writers only run out of things to write about if they allow themselves to stop paying attention to what is going on around them or allow themselves to be controlled by fear. If you want to write, write. If you don't feel inspired, look out the window, take a walk, take a break, and then sit down and write anyway. It won't always be easy; it often isn't. Sometimes, though, the pieces you like least while you are writing them, those pieces that come from a complete lack of inspiration, can turn out to be quite good when you look at them again.

Just sit down and write. Put words on paper or on a screen. Even if it's just one word, over and over, it may develop into something more.

For the [IndieInk Writing Challenge](#) this week, [Michael](#) challenged me with ““I believe that writers run out of material, I really do.” -Brian Wilson” and I challenged [Tara Roberts](#) with ““I speak for the dead.” Don’t go the Orson Scott Card route, please. Make it scientific rather than psychological.”

Testing...

Earlier today, Wendryn and I finished the process of moving this website from Yahoo! hosting to hosting at [one.com](#). As far as I can tell, everything is up and running correctly, however there may still be a few bugs for the next day or two while we sort out any unexpected problems, and while the rest of the internet catches up. If this post appears on the website, all is well.

If you subscribe to the RSS feed for this site, you may need to resubscribe. The new feed can be found at <http://wendryn.com/wp/feed/>.

Ta!

xander